

**Private Land Public Wildlife Advisory Council
MEETING SUMMARY**

Wednesday, April 23, 2014, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Thursday, April 24, 2014, 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

The Billings Hotel and Convention Center

Council Members Present:

Joe Perry (Chairman), Richard Stucker (Vice-Chairman), Dwayne Andrews, Chris King, Kathy Hadley, Jack Billingsley, Blake Henning, Rod Bullis, Daniel Fiehrer, Lisa Flowers, Denley Loge, Jim Peterson (State Senator), Kendall Van Dyk (State Senator), Kevin Chappell (ex officio - DNRC)

FWP Staff Present:

Jeff Hagener, Alan Charles, Ken McDonald, Joe Weigand, and Mike Lewis

Facilitator:

Emily Schembra, Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy

MEETING SUMMARY:

This document summarizes the Private Land Public Wildlife Advisory Council (Council) meeting convened on Wednesday, April 23rd and Thursday, April 24th, 2014. The summary focuses on agenda items, discussion, and action items related to each agenda item. Meeting presentations and handouts are attached.

Wednesday, April 23rd

AGENDA ITEM 1: WELCOME AND TRAPLINE REPORTS

Joe Perry (Chair) opened the meeting with a welcome, and asked members to share their trapline reports from the past month. General themes that emerged from the reports included:

- Questions about the need for more funding directed towards Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) access programs, and the sentiment that resident sportsmen would likely support a license fee increase so long as there was transparency as to where the dollars go;
- Mistrust for landowner incentive programs, specifically any program that may propose a transferrable license for landowners who allow access, especially in light of the current land trade controversies;
- General support for the Block Management Program, and the feeling that many citizens are in agreement with FWP's response to the BMP Performance Audit;
- Impacts from political issues, such as the controversy surrounding a proposed statewide bison conservation plan (there were several reports of land closures);
- High satisfaction with the BMP and the staff in Region 2;
- Some support for a corner crossing program *if* the crossing occurred directly in the corner, had adequate signage, and did not allow motorized use;
- Differences between sportsmen who are the “non-vocal majority” and “seek meat for their freezers” (and are generally satisfied with FWP access programs), and the “vocal minority” of sportsmen who seek trophy game (and are seemingly unsatisfied);

- Difficulty that may arise when “selling” a license fee increase to 1) members of the public who do not understand FWP’s fee structure/programs, and 2) the Montana Legislature.

AGENDA ITEM 2: REPORT ON BLOCK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM AND AUDIT-RELATED PROGRESS, UPDATE ON UNLOCKING STATE LANDS PROGRAM

Alan Charles, FWP, discussed many of the administrative changes FWP is making in response to the BMP Performance Audit. Many of the changes will be instituted in the next several months. For example, in response to Recommendation 1, which asked FWP to increase consistency within the BMP program, FWP has instituted a new evaluation and ranking policy to be used when enrolling landowners. FWP will also use a new procedure to calculate hunter days and 2014 contract renewals will be for one year only. In order to address long-term recommendations, such as Recommendation 2 (which suggested the need for reduced BMP expenditures or increased BMP funding), FWP will continue on-going work. The audit team is expected to return to FWP in Fall 2014 to assess the progress that has been made. A summary of the proposed administrative changes is available in **Attachment A: BMP Audit Response – Short Term (2014)**.

Following Mr. Charles’s presentation the PL/PW Council asked several questions to clarify the changes. Alan clarified that FWP has not redefined the meaning of “hunter day,” but expanded the term in order to compensate for impacts from the entire hunting party and not only those with an ALS number. The change was made in response to the Audit’s accusation that hunter day totals were not accurately calculated on some Block Management Areas.

AGENDA ITEM 3: REVIEW AND DISCUSS REGIONAL BLOCK MANAGEMENT ANNUAL SUMMARY REPORTS

Prior to the PL/PW Council meeting Alan Charles had compiled regional Block Management Reports from all FWP regions in order to provide the Council with in-depth information from around the state. Mr. Charles discussed the reports with Council members and answered several questions. Themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- The BMP summary compilation from all regions is an excellent tool, which could be distributed to BMP cooperators and other interested parties. Council members were very pleased with the summaries.
- Each region should be required to fill in the information according to a very specific template in order to ensure consistency in the information that is reported. Council members discussed the need for reports to be standardized and consistent with regard to fonts, style, formatting, page numbers, etc.
- The regional summaries highlight the large areas covered by BMP staff (especially hunting access coordinators and technicians), and how hard all of the staff work to maintain the BMP program.

Mr. Charles also updated the Council on the *Unlocking State Lands Program*. FWP recently signed up the program’s first enrollee. *Unlocking State Lands* allows public recreationalists to cross enrolled private land in order to gain access to otherwise inaccessible parcels of state land.

In exchange, the landowner who allows access receives an annual tax credit of \$500 per agreement. The Council voiced general support for the program, and optimism that more landowners would enroll in the future.

Finally, in response to questions from Council members about FWP's BMP website, Mr. Charles walked Council members through the BMP website, including the property maps and property rules for a few BMAs. The BMP website interactive mapper will be accessible online beginning August 15th 2014. During discussion with the Council, Mr. Charles clarified that the maps are updated regularly, and new technological advances are being planned by the Department. The changes will involve an overhaul of the current database and so the effort will be a major endeavor.

AGENDA ITEM 4: LICENSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Paul Sihler and Hank Worsch, FWP, summarized recommendations made by the License and Funding Advisory Council. The presentation slides are available as **Attachment B: Budget & License Presentation**. The topics included:

- 1) A summary of the Department's current financial situation.
- 2) Explanation of the Council's recommendations.
- 3) Discussion of work that may be relevant to the PL/PW Council's charge.

Mr. Sihler explained that the Council's focus was how to address the \$5.75 million annual shortfall the Department is expecting in the next four years. Essentially FWP has three options, which include fee increases, budget cuts, and/or changing earmarked programs and re-directing those funds. Of the current funding base, 2/3 of comes from resident and non-resident hunters, and 1/3 is federal funding such as Pitman-Robertson (PR), Dingell-Johnson, and State Wildlife Funding. The Department needs \$10 million in its bank account in order to have the cash flow to pay bills when they come due. Wolf management, invasive species management and other programs have been added to the Department's plate since the last fee increase in 2005.

Hank Worsch explained that the council focused on existing discount and free licenses, which results in \$4.9 million annual in losses to the Department. The Advisory Council's recommendation was to retain discount/free licenses for military personnel from MT, free big game combination licenses for landowners enrolled in Block Management, and joint tribal licenses, but alter youth licenses (age categories), seniors licenses (increase eligibility age for upland game and fishing licenses from age 62 to 67), and disabled licenses (reevaluate the qualifications of disabled).

The License and Funding Advisory Council spent time evaluating the *Come Home to Hunt* and *Non-Resident Montana Native* hunting licenses and agreed these should both be big game combination licenses priced at half the price of the general big game combination licenses. However, the License and Funding Advisory Council ultimately agreed that any effort to combine the licenses into a single license should be made by the PL/PW Council.

Council discussion focused on a general hunting fee increase and other options that must be considered to overcome the Department's budget shortfall. The Council discussed the Montana

Legislature's potential resistance to passing a license fee increase. FWP staff explained that any proposed fee increase would need to specify where the funds should be earmarked to go (e.g., access or other programs). Lisa Flowers suggested that identifying where the funds from each license go (on the license or license receipt) may help increase transparency and build public support for a fee increase. However, FWP staff explained that the division of funding from each license (~100 types) is very complicated and would be difficult to market in a clear manner. The Council also discussed their agreement with the suggestion to combine the *Come Home to Hunt* and *Non-Resident Montana Native* licenses. Some Council members were involved in development of the *Come Home to Hunt* license, and feel that it is still important in the sense of maintaining the Montana hunting heritage and family networks. In order to explore what the combined licenses may look like, the Council asked Mr. Charles and Mr. Worsch to draft an example, or "straw dog," for combining the licenses.

NEXT STEPS

- Alan Charles and Hank Worsch will develop an example license that combines *Coming Home to Hunt* and the *Non-Resident Montana Native* licenses and present their work to Council members.

AGENDA ITEM 5: WORK SESSION – EVALUATE OPTIONS AND SEEK AGREEMENT ON PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PL/PW Council members spend the rest of the meeting evaluating and seeking agreement on options developed to address Goals 2, 3, and 4 (of six total). A summary and the Council's preliminary package of recommendations can be found in Attachment C: Preliminary Recommendations.

AGENDA ITEM 6: PUBLIC COMMENT

Three members of the public provided comment to the Council. Public comment is summarized below.

- **J.W. Westman:** Laurel Rod and Gun Club, Park City, MT: Mr. Westman appreciates the ranching community and the PL/PW Council; however, it makes him nervous to hear this group discuss landowner incentives. Discussion about ranching for wildlife has been a common occurrence in his area, and the threat of landowners being offered transferrable licenses is a major issue. He asked the council to be careful when discussing these issues. Wealthy newcomers that come to Montana should be held responsible for following the same rules and regulations as all other citizens.
- **Paul Ellis,** outfitter and sportsman, Bozeman, MT: Mr. Ellis suggested a late season cow hunt, and believes that a majority of hunters would like a late season cow hunt to provide food for their family (fewer want a large bull). He believes limited elk permits around the Missouri Breaks resulted in increased elk numbers and reduced hunter permits and accessibility due to landowners locking their lands. Residents and non-residents who don't draw permits over several years end up going elsewhere, which causes loss of revenue for the Department. Citizen Advisory Councils need authority and power to

make changes. Licenses from HB 454 are not working; FWP should start listening to landowners and providing better opportunities for hunters/landowners.

- **Mark Robbins:** Landowner, sportsman and outfitter, Roy, MT: Mr. Robbins objects, as a landowner, to be put under pressure from FWP to offer public hunting access. The discrepancy between Department sentiment and regulations in western Montana and eastern Montana is not fair or popular with landowners. More and more resident hunters are willing to pay for access. Flexibility within FWP programs seems to be non-existent, and the idea of expanding or offering flexibility with regard to HB 454 is unrealistic.

AGENDA ITEM 7: WRAP UP AND ADJOURN

Adjourn.

Wednesday, April 24th

AGENDA ITEM 1: WELCOME

Joe Perry (Chair) opened the meeting and asked Council members to share their certificates from completing the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project training. Members were able to celebrate completion of the training course. The Council also spent time deliberating the Council's work, progress, and goals. As recommendations are finalized, members are starting to encounter the "tough issues," but are motivated to come up with consensus solutions for all of Montana.

AGENDA ITEM 2: WORK SESSION – EVALUATE OPTIONS AND SEEK AGREEMENT ON PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

PL/PW Council members evaluated and sought agreement on options developed to address Goals 1, 5 and 6 (of six total). A summary and the Council's preliminary package of recommendations can be found in Attachment C: Preliminary Recommendations.

The Council decided that several of the options should *not* move forward as preliminary recommendations. Other options were combined or significantly changed. Finally, the Council developed several new options, which they moved forward as recommendations.

During this session, Senator Peterson asked Director Hagener to describe the great priorities or challenges he sees that the PL/PW Council could address. Director Hagener's points, as questions, included:

- Does the current season structure work? Are there potential season structure changes that could solve problems for hunters and open up more private land for hunting access?
- Current access programs are not covering all of Montana's hunting access needs, and the Block Management Program is not attractive to some landowners. How do we make these programs more attractive?
- How do we make HB 454 a more useful program?
- How do we appeal to new landowners who do not understand the Montana hunting heritage?

- What can outfitters and landowners do together to allow more access?
- How do we fund the Council's solutions, and support access programs? If the Council recommends more funding, is that the answer? What would the funding be used for?

AGENDA ITEM 3: WRAP UP AND NEXT STEPS

Four working groups were formed in order to further develop and refine the preliminary recommendations by the June 2014 PL/PW Council meeting. **Working groups include:**

- *Working Group tasked with developing a recommendation for a pilot program to increase public access to private property and outfitted lands (potentially an expansion of HB 454):* Kendall Van Dyke, Joe Perry, Jim Peterson, Blake Henning, and Jack Billingsley
- *Working Group tasked with developing a recommendation for a volunteer corner crossing program:* Daniel Fiehrer, Kathy Hadley, Chris King, Dwayne Andrews, and Joe Weigand (FWP)
- *Working Group tasked with developing a recommendation to support and encourage the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project:* Lisa Flowers, Rod Bullis, Alan Charles (FWP)
- *Working Group tasked with developing possible recommendations for access program funding, including possibly combining the Home to Hunt and Non-Resident Montana Native licenses, based upon potential needs associated with Council recommendations:* Dwayne Andrews, Chris King, Lisa Flowers, Joe Perry, and Denley Loge.

NEXT STEPS

- Emily will contact the working groups focused on a pilot program, volunteer corner crossing program, and the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project ASAP to coordinate initial conference calls.
- Working groups will be tasked with developing and refining recommendations in time for the May 14-15 meeting, with the goal of finalizing recommendations at the June meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 4: PUBLIC COMMENT

Two members of the public provided comment to the Council. Comments are summarized below.

- **Mike Penfold**, Program Director, Outdoor Montana: Natural resource-related issues such as hunting on public lands and BMAs are important. Residents could put more money towards expanded access programs. Public lands are overcrowded, with too much motorized traffic. Montana is seeing new landowners with different values, and also

hunters from the urban areas with different values. FWP must come up with solutions in order to prevent a train wreck.

- **J.W. Westman:** Laurel Rod and Gun Club, Park City, MT: *See typed comments (Attachment D).*

Adjourn.

ALL MEETING FOLLOW-UP ITEMS AND TASKS

- Alan Charles and Hank Worsech will develop an example license that combines *Coming Home to Hunt* and the *Non-Resident Montana Native* licenses and present their work to Council members.
- Emily will contact the working groups focused on a pilot program, volunteer corner crossing program, and the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project ASAP to coordinate initial conference calls.
- Working groups will be tasked with developing and refining recommendations in time for the May 14-15 meeting, with the goal of finalizing recommendations at the June meeting.
- Council members are encouraged to review the *Preliminary Recommendations* document, and to contact Emily ASAP if they feel something was not captured accurately.
- The next meeting will be May 14-15 in Missoula at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation headquarters building.
- Mike Lewis will present data on recent survey work at the May meeting.
- Alan Charles will try to arrange for a Block Management Coordinator to speak to the Council at the May or June meeting (recognizing that they are very busy with the BMP this time of year and scheduling may be difficult).